

our children learn the basics before being promoted to the next grade. This is crucial to our country's social and economic well-being.

A talented and dedicated teacher must be in every classroom. Creativity and innovation in public education must be encouraged, while still holding them accountable for results. Every classroom and library should be connected to the Internet so all students can be computer literate and be prepared for the 21st century.

Finally, we need to make sure our schools are healthy places to learn. Next week I intend to introduce legislation to improve air quality in our Nation's school buildings based on an existing Environmental Protection Agency program. Our children must have a healthy learning environment.

Let us make the commitment not only to our children but also to the future of this great Nation, and make education our number one priority.

SIGNING THE DISCHARGE PETITION TO ALLOW DEBATE ON THE PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Mr. HOLT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, today many of us are signing the discharge petition to bring a Patients' Bill of Rights to the floor for free and open debate. I know the American public want it. I certainly know my constituents want it.

They want a restoration of the doctor-patient relationship so that doctors can determine medical necessity, so that doctors and their patients can make the medical decisions, so that health care plans are held accountable for their medical decisions or lack of decisions.

I am certainly proud that I have able to take the first legislative action in the Congress on the subject by introducing in subcommittee an amendment to hold health care plans accountable for their medical decisions.

The leadership has been holding the American public in the waiting room. This discharge petition will allow us to get out of the waiting room and get the health care that we Americans deserve.

WHAT A DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY IN CONGRESS WOULD MEAN

(Mr. REYNOLDS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Speaker, not counting social security, the Congressional Budget Office or CBO projects an \$824 billion in budget surpluses over the next 10 years. Again, that is not counting the temporary surplus in the social security trust fund.

Guess what the Democrats are planning to do with the surplus. Well, if the statements by the President, the House Minority Leader, and the Minority Leader in the other body are any indication, we might be surprised to learn that what they want to do is take this surplus and raise taxes; Members have heard that right, raise taxes, not cut them.

Many people in Washington are shaking their heads over the recent statements by Democratic Party leaders, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT) and Mr. DASCHLE. The gentleman from Missouri said earlier this month while in Ann Arbor, Michigan, unbelievably, that he would consider cutting defense and raising taxes in order to expand Washington's role in our schools.

Now we have a Democratic leader in the other body who stated on CNN's Evans and Novak that tax increases were "on the table." I guess there is really no need to ask what a Democrat majority in Congress would mean.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KINGSTON). Members must be reminded to not make reference to statements off the floor of Members of the other body.

DEMOCRATS TAKE THE NEXT STEP TOWARD REAL PATIENT PROTECTIONS

(Mr. MENENDEZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, today Democrats take the next step in the long, arduous road to real patient protections, despite the fact that Republicans continue to construct roadblocks to meaningful managed care reform.

Republicans will claim that they are moving managed care reform through the committee process, but what they will not tell us is that these so-called reforms lack meaning and enforcement.

The American people deserve more than empty promises and rhetoric. They deserve to choose their doctor. They deserve access to specialists. They deserve to have doctors, not health care bureaucrats, making their vital medical decisions. Most importantly, they deserve legal remedies to hold their health plans accountable.

The Democratic Patients' Bill of Rights provides these guarantees. Republicans are up to the same old tricks again this year. They will not even allow us to bring the Democratic Patients' Bill of Rights to a debate here on the floor for the American people to listen and ultimately for all of us to vote on.

Last year, protecting their special interests, they narrowly defeated the real patient protections Democrats pushed to the floor. Then realizing that we represented the views of Americans across this country, they put forth a watered down proposal to try to detract from the real issues.

Again this year Republicans are doing the same thing. This discharge petition should serve as a wake-up call to Republicans that Americans want real patient protections and they want it now.

REAL REFORM FOR THE TAX CODE

(Mr. HEFLEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HEFLEY. Mr. Speaker, oftentimes people come up to me and say, the politicians are always talking about reforming the Tax Code, getting rid of the Tax Code, making it easier to file our taxes, but nothing ever changes. How come that is?

The short answer is that the special interests benefit from the Tax Code, and the complexity of the Tax Code is a source of enormous government power. Thus, it would not be in the interests of anyone who wants to expand government power to change the Tax Code in a more sane direction.

Another reason is equally valid. It is called Tax Code progressivity. Any attempt to change the Tax Code into something that made sense, that actually looked like it was designed on purpose, would be met with howls of protests from the liberals. They would say it was unfair because it would undermine progressivity.

A flat tax, one rate, meaning that the more you make the more taxes you pay, is already a system that is fair and that makes high earners pay their fair share. A sales tax would also be fair.

In my view, if Members are against the flat tax or the sales tax, all the talk about reforming the Tax Code is simply empty rhetoric.

THE HOUSE MUST ADDRESS CERTAIN DISTURBING TRENDS IN GUN VIOLENCE

(Mr. BLAGOJEVICH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BLAGOJEVICH. Mr. Speaker, among the disturbing trends in America relating to gun violence are those loopholes where teenagers and criminals can get guns at gun shows. This House has yet to address this issue.

Another dangerous trend is the increasing availability of military-style weapons to the civilian market. Examples of these are laser sights, high-capacity ammunition clips, and the 50-caliber sniper rifle.